

Savvy with Nature: Yreka Students Know the Outdoors

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June 2008

Local grade-schoolers ended the academic year here in Siskiyou County last week, but before the final school bell rang in summer vacation, some youngsters had one last assignment to fulfill.

Luckily for them it was *outside* the classroom in the form of a field trip that showcased the work of various government agencies and businesses located in the area. The Yreka Fish and Wildlife Office was one of the participants.

Students from Yreka's Jackson and Gold Street elementary schools got first-hand instruction in wildlife biology, conservation and outdoor education, thanks, in part, to the Yreka Fish and Wildlife Office

Jennifer Jones, a FWS biologist with a long track record in working with youth, showed the students dozens of animal skulls of all shapes and sizes. The task for these students: identify the animals associated with the skulls based on its shape and features.

To her surprise, many of the students – some as young as nine – had no problem identifying the specimens. Terms like herbivores, carnivores and omnivores were not new to these kids.

“We explained that the role of a wildlife biologist is that of a detective, always searching for clues and information based on what we are able to find in the field,” said Jones. “These kids really identified with us and it is so encouraging to see an existing appreciation for the outdoor among many of the kids we met.”

After they aced Jones' animal artifact test, **Scott Yaeger**, another biologist from the Yreka FWO, quizzed the students on other tools wildlife officials use to obtain information in the field.

“It was nice to be up front giving our presentations and every once in a while you notice that our words are making a connection to an individual child,” said Yaeger. “Making that kind of an impression is very rewarding.”

Yaeger showed students examples of non-invasive approaches to collect information on wild animals. He demonstrated equipment such as remote motion detecting infrared cameras, track plates and hair snares.

Yaeger asked a group of nine and ten year-olds why collecting hair was important. “It's used for DNA,” the students cheered excitedly. “It's just like CSI!”

With Jones and Yaeger providing instruction on wildlife identification, **Darla Eastman** concluded the Yreka FWO presentation with a discussion about the importance of wildlife conservation.

Eastman, a supervisory administrative officer for the Yreka FWO and veteran of these types of outreach efforts, made a vivid impression on the students by talking about the seriousness of intentionally harming endangered species.

She had a number of items – some of which made into illegal consumer products – arrayed on a long table. Eastman explained that each item was confiscated by federal wildlife officials from various ports-of-entry around the country and that sale and possession of these products could carry a significant penalty.

The students were shown examples of the contraband, which included a tortoise shell hair comb, coral, zebra pelt, python skin and designer purses and shoes made from endangered reptiles.

“The students came to the event with a solid understanding of wildlife conservation but they definitely left with an even greater appreciation for the need to protect endangered species,” said Eastman. “These kids were eager to learn all they could about our mission to protect fish and wildlife.”

Each of the staff members from the Yreka FWO said they enjoyed the one-on-one time and personal interaction with the kids, who are really the next generation of conservationists and outdoor enthusiasts. For Jones, Yaeger and Eastman, it was time well spent and they are looking forward to the next opportunity to help connect children with nature.

“The nine-year old kids may only remember one thing from our presentation, but that one thing will have a lasting impact,” Eastman concluded.

Darla Eastman (left) and Jennifer Jones of the Yreka Fish and Wildlife Office prove that spending time connecting children and nature can be just as fun for adults. Students from Jackson Street Elementary School identified animals by looking for clues from skull features .



Scott Yaeger demonstrates how track plates and other non-invasive methods are used to gather information on wildlife. A classroom from Yreka's Jackson Street Elementary School took a end-of-year field trip to about local government agencies and businesses located in Siskiyou County.



Darla Eastman shows students examples of the confiscated wildlife. Students learned about the importance of wildlife conservation and the threats to endangered species at a school field trip in Yreka's Greenhorn Park.

